



NATIONAL MUSEUM of  
NATURAL HISTORY  
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

FEB 11 1993

MOTION PICTURE, SOUNDING  
AND RECORDED SECTIONS

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

February 12, 1993. Public Hearings of the National Film  
Preservation Board

John P. Homiak, Director

Human Studies Film Archives, NMNH, Smithsonian Institution

This document seeks to familiarize members of the National Film Preservation Board with a specialized body of film materials in need of preservation. This aspect of our nation's cultural heritage is little known outside the pursuits of anthropology, ethnographic and documentary filmmaking, and scholarly archival film research. It is, however, an enormously rich body of material which documents the lifeways of non-Western and indigenous peoples at various times and places in this century. These include:

- 1) anthropological filmmaking projects from which edited films have been produced
- 2) ethnographic research films (non-broadcast) produced for scholarly analysis
- 3) travelogues, "scenics", expeditionary films, and amateur ethnographic footage

A wealth of such materials--yet to be preserved--exists across this country in university archives, state historical societies, museums, and in the attics of professional scholars and travelers. The Smithsonian's Human Studies Film Archives is presently the only national organization which seeks to identify and preserve such materials.

The following outline describes our mandate and its scope and significance.

Preservation Mandate and Goals.

Established in 1981, the Smithsonian's Human Studies Film Archives (HSFA) traces its origins to the efforts of 25-30 anthropologists and filmmakers in the early 1970s who were committed to the creation of a national center for the preservation of anthropological film. Led by Margaret Mead, a passionate advocate for the use of film in anthropology, these ethnographers and filmmakers established a professional consensus about the

DEDICATED TO UNDERSTANDING THE NATURAL WORLD AND OUR PLACE IN IT

importance of preserving existing film records and creating new film records on the rapidly changing or disappearing cultures of the world. At a NSF-funded conference held in Washington, D.C. in 1971 this group founded the National Anthropological Film Center, the predecessor unit to the HSFA.

Since this time, the HSFA has collected, preserved, and organized for research approximately seven (7) million feet of film and video footage which documents various aspects of the non-Western cultures of the world. Many of our collections constitute unique visual records which are not found in published ethnographic films or in other repositories. The HSFA continues to be the only national organization with a specific mission to identify and preserve film and video records deemed to be of anthropological and cultural-historical significance.

Acquisition of materials is accomplished by networking through various profession, scholarly, and archival communities including the Society for Visual Anthropology, the National Center for Film and Video Preservation (AFI), and the Association of Moving Image Archivists (SAA). On average, the HSFA accessions some 200,000 feet of film and 100 hours of video each year. Our staff includes a Director, one full-time and one-part time film archivist, and one video technician.

#### Significance of the Collections.

The HSFA represents a largely unique and eclectic collection of original film and video materials which can be grouped into the three (3) categories identified above.

(1) Full film records of major anthropological filmmaking projects from which various ethnographic films have been edited. These collections have been created various by professional filmmakers with extensive cultural knowledge or by trained ethnographic filmmakers working independently or in concert with an anthropological expert.

These include major holdings such as the !Kung Film project, 1950-1978 (over 700,000 feet of 16mm footage shot by John Marshall on the !Kung San and //Gwi San of the Kalahari, northwest Namibia); the Jie and Turkana Film Projects (some 55,000 feet of 16mm footage on Jie and Turkana pastoralism in Uganda shot by David and Judith MacDougall); and Yanomamö Film Project (approximately 100,000 feet shot by Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon on the Yamomamö Indians of southern Venezuela and Brazil); the Long Bow Film Project, 1979 and 1982 (125,000 feet of 16mm shot by Richard Gordon and Carma Hinton documenting the collective life of a village in Shanxi Province in Post-Mao China; the Pashtoon Nomad Film Project, 1975-76 (95,000 feet 16mm shot by Asen Balikci documenting the migrations and transhumant lifeways of the nomads of northern

Afghanistan); and the **Navajo Film Project**, 1938-1986 (40,000 feet 16mm shot by John Adair which explores four generations of a Navajo family life).

These collections are significant for a combination of historical, conceptual, and methodological reasons. For example, the !Kung and the Yanomamö film projects both document the lifeways of hunting and gathering cultures that have experienced enormous change since these records were created. The !Kung record is unparalleled in anthropological film documentation. It constitutes a virtual encyclopedia on the culture of the San Bushmen which will span over forty years of change within this culture when John Marshall archives his remaining footage with the HSFA.

The Yanomamö project (1968-71) documents the largest and, at the time, the least acculturated tribe in South America. These projects, like others in our collections, record important moments of change in various non-Western cultures.

As in much visual anthropology conceived in the 1960s, a number of these projects had the conceptual purpose to document and represent the relationship between culture (a cognitive and ideational system) and different modes of subsistence (e.g., hunting-and-gathering, swidden agriculture, pastoralism, peasant agriculture) thus documenting different societal types. Finally, the films made from these projects reflect a range of styles in ethnographic filmmaking (e.g., expository narrative, observational, cinema verite, and reflexive). The works of John Marshall and Timothy Asch, for example, are key to understanding the evolution of anthropological "sequence films"; that of David MacDougall to the development of observational styles; and the Navajo Film Project to the inception of indigenous media.

**(2) Anthropological research film and video collections of raw unedited footage.** Many of these collections are accompanied by synchronous sound annotations and other supplementary research documentation.

These holdings include a large body of materials shot with the understanding that the motion picture camera is a valid tool for scientific research which can capture data for later study and analysis. These collections include the entire body of work produced by the National Anthropological Film Center (including projects in Tibet, Nepal, India, Mexico, the New Hebrides (Republic of Vanuatu), and New Guinea, as well as various film collections which were generated as part of the fieldwork of individual anthropologists.

These collections include extensive documentation on socialization practices, ritual, dance, and movement, and social interaction based on distinctions of identity, age, and gender. Examples include: the Enga Film Project, 1975 (43,000 feet 16mm on the Enga of Papua New Guinea); the Afro-Brazilian Video Project, 1988 (50 hours of videotape on the African-derived traditions of Maranhao, Northern Brazil); and Film Studies of Traditional Tibetan

Life & Culture, 1978-81 (191,000 feet 16mm shot in Ladak, India, 1978-81 on life of Tibetan refugees).

In addition to their value as research materials on specific cultures, these materials (like most of our films/footage) also have enormous value as historical records for both scholars and indigenous peoples.

Prime examples of such films include Robert Zingg's documentation of the Huichol and Tarahumara Indians (Sierra Madre, Mexico, 1933), Colin Turnbull's documentation of the nkumbi initiations of the Mbuti Pygmy (1954), William Van Valin's films of the Inupiat Eskimos of Point Barrow, Alaska (1916-1919). The Zingg footage is believed to be the first moving image documentation ever taken of Huichol or Tarahumara Indians and is currently being requested for use by present-day Huichol and Tarahumara. The Turnbull materials record Mbuti life shortly before the Simba Wars which altered the fabric of Pygmy life in this part of Central Africa.

(3) an eclectic collection of documentary, expeditionary, travelogue, and amateur ethnographic films which are of interest as historical documents, anthropological data, and sites of representation.

These films--shot during the early decades of this century through the 1950s--are important records of a Western middle-class need to explore, document, and understand the world according to the prevailing cinematic conventions and social outlooks and ideology. Frequently, such films not only contain important ethnographic documentation, they are records of how Euro-American peoples have constructed images of the non-Western world. This portion of the HSFA collection reveals much about the parallel history of development between the cinema and anthropology, both of which derive from the same 19th century Euro-American intellectual and cultural foundations (see Ruby 1980: 165).

Among this category are unique historical film documents which might be considered of special importance to our national heritage insofar as they document life among Native Americans, other ethnic groups, or the archaeological excavations of important North American sites.

These collections of footage and films include: Crow Agency, Montana, 1908; Lakota Sioux, Rosebud Reservation, 1930; Sioux, Belle Fourche, South Dakota, 1938, 1942; Oglala Sioux, 1937; the Navaho Reservation (1948-151); Gallup ceremonies including Navaho, Apache, Pueblo Indians (several collections from 1930s); Navaho Fair, Windowrock, Arizona, c. 1938; Taos Pueblo, c. 1926 and 1938; Acoma Pueblo, 1919; Hopi, c. 1920; Blackfeet, Montana, 1939; California Indians (Hupa, Yoruk, and Koruk), 1926-32; Cheyenne Sun Dance, 1930s; Havasupai, 1953; Catawba Indians, 1926; Cherokee, 1926; Inupiat Eskimos, Point Barrow, Alaska, 1916-19; Yupik and Inupiat Eskimos, 1928-1950s; African American (Gullah) Shouts,

Georgia, 1928; footage of Italian American Giglio festivals, 1939, 1950); various archaeological sites including Adena Burial Mound Excavation (Kentucky), 1939; and Excavations on Kodiak Island, Alaska, 1934.

From an anthropological perspective, these collections are important records of community life, aesthetic practices, ceremonial and ritual activities, indigenous subsistence and technology, and acculturation. For many groups, these collections may be the only visual documentation ever made (or ever preserved) from the early part of this century. From this perspective they are of historical interest to both scholars and native peoples alike. Through the preservation done at the HSFA, it has become possible for a number of Native American groups to "reappropriate" images made of them decades ago. Such footage becomes important to contemporary Native Americans as they seek to revitalize cultural memory and to reconfigure the meanings of these images for the transmission of their cultural heritage.<sup>1</sup>

Inasmuch as many of these films were taken by amateurs, these film documents also provide historical insight into how the dominant American society has looked at indigenous peoples within its midst and thus how amateur filmmaking and representation intersects with prevailing stereotypes of native peoples. This is a point which holds for materials taken elsewhere in the world.

#### Context Enhancement and Researchability.

In order to function as an anthropological film archives, we firmly believe that the preservation of film must be coupled with the project of making moving images researchable for scholars. Whenever possible, therefore, we seek to acquire as much supplementary documentation on films in the form of accompanying written manuscripts, film and/or travel logs, fieldnotes, and the like.

In addition, it is the policy of the HSFA (whenever possible) to produce context enhance for films in the form of a synchronous sound annotation by the filmmaker or an appropriate anthropological expert. These supplementary materials place a film and its contents both in cultural and historical perspective and serve as a guide to researchers. To our knowledge, the HSFA is the only film archive which has developed a set of procedures for such annotations and

---

<sup>1</sup> Presently, the HSFA is working with two groups of Native Alaskans to make moving images of their cultural heritage available. This has already been done with the first film footage taken of Inupiat at Point Barrow, Alaska. Since the preservation of this footage at the HSFA, it has been used in at least two indigenous productions by the contemporary Inupiat to communicate the importance of traditional lifeways to younger members of the North Slope community.

which expends a portion of its operating funds on creating such accompanying materials.

The HSFA also maintains both paper and on-line computer records of its collections, catalogued according to authority terms based on the Human Relations Area Files publications Outline of World Cultures (1982) and Outline of Cultural Materials (1987). This work, which is ongoing within our organization, provides researchers with access points to search our records for specific locations, culture groups, and anthropological subject terms.

#### Ongoing Importance to Scholarly and Other Communities.

As noted above, the HSFA is the only national archive with a mission to identify and preserve film records of anthropological significance. By virtue of our past record in the field of visual anthropology, we are confronted by increasing demands by the anthropological community to preserve film records created in association with fieldwork.

In addition, as the HSFA has become known outside more narrow anthropological circles, we encounter increasing requests from various university archives who are unequipped to deal with film preservation, cataloguing, and reference use (particularly of sizeable film collections). Over the past few years, for example, the HSFA has collaborated with the University of Texas, The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture (College of Charleston, S.C.), the University of Wisconsin, and Santa Clara University to bring major collections to the Smithsonian for preservation. This typically involves making video donor materials available to these institutions for their own reference use.

As noted above for film footage on Native American, the HSFA has found cultural groups around the world to be anxious to reclaim and reinterpret filmic images of their traditional lifeways based on the ways in which they have fashioned histories of cultural change, transformation, or resistance. With the now burgeoning development of self-representation through indigenous media initiatives around the world, we anticipate that our holdings will become progressively important to native filmmakers seeking to represent their own past.

Finally, as a result of our own work it has become clear that preservation of various overlooked film materials need to be pursued on a more programmatic basis. Historically, certain cultures and parts of the world are more represented than others in our collections. This reflects, we believe, a complex intersection of factors like the development of tourism, political changes linked to the development of "area studies" departments which focused attention on different parts of the world at different times, popular ideologies which created an interest in certain non-Western peoples as "exotic" or as "noble savages", or social scientific paradigms (like ecological adaptation) which directed

attention to specific modes of subsistence (hunting-and-gathering or pastoral nomadism).

Given their relative dearth in our collections, we feel that more effort is required to discover professional and amateur films of Native Americans both in the northern and southern parts of the hemisphere. We are convinced that such films remain spread across the nation in the archives of universities, museums, state historical societies, and private attics. In most cases, neither institutions or individuals have the programs, knowledge, or resources to preserve these materials.

Based on our experience with the increasing research interest in early documentary and travelogue films, we also urge that films such as the Pathé Science Series, Kodak Cinegraph Films, and the travelogues of Burton Holmes need to be identified and preserved in a single repository for future research access. Classics like Nanook of the North (Flaherty, 1922) and Grass (Schoedsack and Cooper, 1925) notwithstanding, these above travelogues are among the first films to fix non-Western peoples and cultures in the visual imaginations of Euro-Americans. In the present day they should be regarded as historical documents which reveal the visual construction of cultural differences around the world.

At the same time, the HSFA recognizes the need to continue to search for miscellaneous collections of historical interest. Through our various colleagues in the film archive community we recognize the need to network and collaborate with stock shot libraries which may own such film materials but may have no particular commercial interest in them.

### Organizational Problems.

As presented staffed and funded, the HSFA is able to preserve and organize a mere fraction of the film materials which we find potentially available for accession into our collections. The current staff includes a director (a Ph.D. trained cultural anthropologist who sets policy, organizes annotations, and represents the Archives in professional contexts), one part-time and one full-time film archivist (who organize collections for preservation and interface with film labs) and a film technician (who principally handles video evaluation and duplication).

Much of the director's and his assistant's time is spent writing proposals and seeking outside funds for our larger preservation projects. In addition, funding limitations coupled with the day-to-day work of the HSFA--which includes responding to requests for footage and working with researchers--precludes a number of pro-active programs which we wish to initiate. These include the editing of various historical films for distribution, various outreach initiatives, and exploring the potentials of videodisc and interactive video for archival use.